



**Kentucky  
Department  
of Agriculture**

**A Consumer  
Protection And  
Service Agency**

# **MARKETING MATTERS**

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## **Robey Dairy Makes The Grade**

**By Warren Beeler**

Robey Farms in Logan County recently hosted a dairy field day with nearly 500 guests attending to tour their new state-of-the-art dairy facility that was constructed in 2003.

The facility was designed with cow comfort in mind. The facility will ultimately have a 1,200-head capacity and has 800 animals presently in production. The barns provide ample room to keep cows healthy and happy which helps the farm achieve maximum production from each animal. The cows are so comfortable that their rolling herd average of nearly 28,000 pounds of milk per cow per year is up 6,000 pounds over the production level at their old facility. For comparison, Kentucky's herd average is approximately 13,000 pounds per cow per year. In addition, the cull rate has shrunk from 40 to 18 percent. Robey Farms has taken dairying in Kentucky to a new level through improved technology, efficient feeding, and cow comfort.

The first thing one notices is how clean the facility and the cows are. A second look found comfortable cows eating or laying down chewing their cud. A third glance found cows in good physical condition with exceptional feet and leg structure, obviously established through a first-rate selective breeding program. Sound feet and legs are a must when keeping cows in a "free-stall" environment on concrete.

The "free-stall" facility was 300 feet long with a slope of 2 percent and had a flush system that when engaged swept the manure and sand clean from the concrete floor. Lee Robey is sold on using coarse sand that is hauled in from the Ohio River. Using sand for bedding has proven effective in reducing cull rates and decreasing somatic cell counts. The flush system delivers the sand and manure to a sand separator, which pulls the sand away to be recycled. The water and manure end up in a four-stage lagoon system where the manure is recycled for fertilizing row crops and forages. In addition to the dairy operation, the Robey's farm approximately 8,000 acres. About 400 acres are harvested as silage along with 60,000 bushels of shelled corn and enough soybeans traded for bean meal and vitamin supplement to balance their feed rations.

The attention to detail was amazing - such as a foot



**Robey's Dairy Farm in Logan County.**

bath that is changed between each group of cows to ensure hoof health. A computerized gate separated cows that were ready for breeding. Locating cows in heat is a 24-hour-a-day job. A vet is scheduled to pregnancy check cows each Wednesday. Cows are milked three times a day with fresh cows milked even more often to guard against udder problems.

In the heifer program, a strict routine is followed in order to get calves off to the best start. The vaccinating, testing, timing, and amount of colostrum used per feeding are strictly administered. The new calf barn has individual clean, well-drained pens that help keep the calves thrifty. Can you imagine taking care of baby calves from 800 cows? It's an enormous responsibility every day. The calf barn was divided into two sections to allow for cleanup in one section while calves could be moved to the other.

The Robey dairy is producing 65,000 pounds of milk a day, a full-time job for the milk hauler. Successful dairy management may be one of the greatest skills a livestock farmer can hope to achieve and the Robeys make it look easy. As people continue to question what will replace tobacco no single answer has emerged, not just one crop or one species of livestock. What we do know is that Kentucky farmers can grow forage and has proven it can raise livestock. The Robeys have taken the dairy business to a new level and make a good case for dairy production as an alternative by selling milk, raising dairy heifers, and producing steers on the farm.

# Beekeeping Advice From Kentucky's State Apiarist

By Phil Craft

If you think you might like to try beekeeping but have questions such as "How much does it cost to get started?", "Do I have to live in the country to keep bees?", or "How much honey will a hive of bees produce?", then go to the Kentucky State Apiarist's Web site by clicking on "Beekeeping in Kentucky" in the drop down menu on the [www.kyagr.com](http://www.kyagr.com) Web site and download my brochure entitled "Beekeeping in Kentucky: What's the BUZZ About?" This brochure is designed to help those interested in beekeeping decide if it is something they would like to pursue.

If you've made the decision to keep bees, here are some do's and don'ts when getting started. First, obtain catalogs from one or more beekeeping equipment supply companies. You can go to my Web site, and under the "information on becoming a beekeeper" link, you can find a listing of beekeeping equipment suppliers that Kentucky beekeepers often do business with. Some of these companies also sell bees and queens. Do not begin ordering equipment before you have educated yourself to some extent. You may end up ordering items that you don't need.

If you can afford it, start off with new equipment, especially when purchasing hives. Disease can be spread through old hives, and it can be difficult for the inexperienced beekeeper to determine the value of used equipment.

Acquire a good beekeeping book and

read it. A book that I often recommend is "The Beekeeper's Handbook" by Diana Sammataro et al. This is an informative book for both brand new and more experienced beekeepers. A very economical beginner book is "How to Get Started With Bees..." by Walter T. Kelley.

It also helps to spend time with experienced beekeepers. Just attending a local beekeeping association meeting and asking questions can be a great help. To locate a beekeeping association near you, check out the list of beekeeping associations at my Web site. If you don't have an association near you, seek out an experienced beekeeper and ask him or her if you could come and watch them open their hives. If you don't know a local beekeeper, check with your county Extension agent.

Join the Kentucky State Beekeepers Association (KSBA): <http://www.ksbabeekeeping.org/default.htm>. KSBA holds meetings in March, June, and November. These meetings present an opportunity to spend time with and ask questions of other beekeepers and apiary professionals. You can also attend one of the beekeeping schools in Kentucky. Most of the one-day schools are held well before the beekeeping season begins and have classes designed for the novice that will really help you get off to a good start.

Next, you will need to acquire bees. The best way for new beekeepers to acquire bees is to purchase package bees from a bee supplier or purchase nucs of bees from a local beekeeper. When

buying package bees, suppliers will ship a new queen and a small quantity of bees in a wooden shipping package through the mail. The beekeeper then installs the bees and the new queen in an empty hive. The installation process is very simple and can be done by someone with zero beekeeping experience by merely following the directions shipped with the bees. This is an excellent way for the new beekeeper to get bees for the first time.

An alternative is purchasing a nuc (short for nucleus hive). A nuc is a new hive, with four or five frames of bees, that an experienced beekeeper has transferred from an existing hive into a separate hive along with a new queen. Nucs are usually available in Kentucky in late April or May.

A third way to get started is to purchase an existing hive from a beekeeper. I tend to discourage novice beekeepers from doing this. The main reason is that an existing hive, containing as many as 40,000 to 60,000 bees, is quite a handful for a brand new beekeeper. A new beekeeper may have to deal immediately with issues such as existing disease or pest problems, which is why I suggest leaving the purchase of existing hives to more experienced beekeepers.

KDA's State Apiarist, Phil Craft, can be reached at (502) 564-5665 ext. 258.

## KDA Organic Program Receives National Accreditation

By Jake Schmitz

It's official. Kentucky organic producers can sign up with the Kentucky Department of Agriculture to have their operations certified organic.

The National Organic Program notified the Department in January that the KDA is authorized to perform certification duties on behalf of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The KDA is one of only 54 accredited certifying agents in the United States.

Products with the "USDA Organic" logo are certified as having been pro-

duced according to the organic production rules of the National Organic Program.

Kentucky organic producers can apply for certification through the KDA for a \$125 certification fee instead of much higher fees charged by some independent certifiers.

KDA is sponsoring a certification cost-share program that will reimburse producers for 75 percent of their registration fees, leaving producers with a registration cost of \$31.25.

The National Organic Program regula-

tions are available on the Web at [www.ams.usda.gov/nop/NOP/standards.html](http://www.ams.usda.gov/nop/NOP/standards.html).

To apply online for organic certification online, go to the Kentucky Department of Agriculture's Web site, [www.kyagr.com](http://www.kyagr.com), and click on Organic Programs on the pull-down menu.

For more information on organic certification, go to the KDA's Organic Programs page or contact Jake Schmitz by phone at (502) 564-4983 or by e-mail at [jake.schmitz@ky.gov](mailto:jake.schmitz@ky.gov).

# Dairy Development Council To Hold First Annual Meeting

By Eunice Schlappi

The first Annual Meeting of the Kentucky Dairy Development Council (KDDC) will take place on Tuesday, February 28, at the Cave City Convention Center. Registration and exhibits will open at 8:30. There is no charge for the meeting, and a buffet lunch will be provided.

A springing Holstein heifer will be given away to a Kentucky dairy producer who attends the meeting. The value of the heifer is approximately \$2,000.

The new Board of Directors that was elected through mail ballots will be installed at the meeting. The 2006 president, vice-president, and secretary of the KDDC will be elected by the new board during the Annual Meeting.

The main focus of the Annual Meeting will be the presentation and discussion of the long-range Kentucky Dairy Strategic Plan. This is the proposal that the KDDC will put before the Ag Development Board to support programs that will include dairy improvements, a Young Farmer Program, and expansion and recruitment. The KDDC needs your input in the discussions for additional ideas or suggested changes to the current work in progress.

## AGENDA

8:30-9:30	Registration and visit exhibits
9:30	Call to order Jim Sidebottom, President Roger Thomas, Executive Director Recognize outgoing Board of Directors Seat newly elected Board of Directors
10:30	Speaker
11:00	Kentucky Dairy Strategic Plan Presentation
12:00-1:30	Lunch/Speaker and visit exhibits
1:15	Closed Board Meeting for Election of Officers
1:30	Install Officers
1:35	Open discussion - Kentucky Dairy Strategic Plan
2:30	Wrap Up, Drawing for Heifer, and Dismiss
2:35	Executive Board Business Meeting

**The KDDC needs your support and attendance at this very important first Annual Meeting. Pre-registration is necessary in planning for meeting space and the meal. If you want to attend, please call Eunice Schlappi at (502) 564-4983.**

## Farmers' Market Manual Available Online

By Janet Eaton

Dealing with the various entities involved in farmers' markets can be a challenge. The Kentucky Department of Agriculture, in partnership with the Department for Public Health, is easing some of that challenge for Kentucky farmers' markets.

Following the successful trial of a manual for farmers' market sellers and managers last year, KDA has developed a comprehensive guide to the rules and regulations governing the sale of the diverse products offered at Kentucky farmers' markets.

"Keeping up with changing regulations can be a full-time job," said Janet Eaton, farmers' market specialist for KDA. "Resource folks are rarely available on Saturday morning when a market manager has to decide if a certain product can be offered at the market that morning."

The manual is designed to be a resource to get answers to questions when those answers are needed. The content of

the manual was determined by questions received from various producers and managers over the last three years, Eaton said.

Interspersed with food safety regulations, the Kentucky Farmers' Market Manual offers producers and managers step-by-step guidance on topics from successful displays to establishing rules that work for the market.

"Education is an important part of the purpose of this manual," said Eaton. "Every market deserves the latest information in a form it can easily use."

Some markets used the trial manual last year to rethink some of their ways of doing business, according to Eaton. She emphasized that every market wants to be financially successful, and one way to increase business is to research successful techniques used by other markets.

The manual is available at [www.kyagr.com](http://www.kyagr.com) by clicking on "farmers' markets" on the drop down menu. A limited number of printed copies is available by calling Janet Eaton at (502) 564-4983.

## 41 Food Companies Exhibiting at Kentucky Crafted: The Market

Kentucky Crafted: "The Market" will host 41 Kentucky Food companies that will offer samples of their products at the 25th edition of the annual show March 3-5 at the Kentucky Fair and Exposition Center.

The public show will be March 4 from 9 a.m.- 6 p.m. EST and March 5 from 10 a.m.-5 p.m. The wholesale show, open to buyers only, will be March 3.

Kentucky companies from Maysville to Cadiz and Fort Mitchell to Williamsburg will offer cheeses, salsas, jams, jellies, marinades, barbecue sauces, pickles, candies, honey, country ham, popcorn, and many other Kentucky Proud foods for the 13th running of the Kentucky Department of Agriculture's food section at Kentucky Crafted.

In all, more than 300 exhibitors will be on hand for Kentucky Crafted in the South Wing B with art, crafts, music, books, and foods.

For details contact the Kentucky Craft Marketing Program at (888) KYCRAFT.

# Are You Looking For Hay For Sale?

By Kimberly Field

Livestock farmers who need hay can find it right here in Kentucky. Listings of farms with hay for sale can be found on the Hay and Forage Program page of the Kentucky Department of Agriculture's Web site, [www.kyagr.com](http://www.kyagr.com).

Last summer's drought reduced hay production for many farmers in Kentucky, but there is still hay available for those who need it. The Hay and Forage Program Web page enables buyers and sellers to find each other.

KDA also offers a hay testing service. KDA staff will take samples of hay and haylage at the farm and analyze them in the KDA Forage Laboratory located in Frankfort. If the hay is to be sold, the staff will make a visual evaluation of the forage to use in the listing on the Hay Sales Directory page. The producer receives an analysis of the forage's nutritional value and an "Interpreting Forage Quality Report" guide.

Tested forages can mean higher profit, whether feeding cattle, horses, goats or other livestock. Forage testing helps to determine fair market value and an equitable price. By keeping a forage journal, producers can use the tests to compare forage quality year-to-year.



The Department charges a \$10 fee per lot for the service. The Kentucky Department of Agriculture's Forage Testing Program follows standards outlined by the National Forage Testing Association (NFTA). Your test results can help your local Extension agent assist you with your winter feed rations.

Listings on the Hay Sales Directory page can be sorted by any combination of county, relative feed value (RFV), bale size and type of hay. Each listing describes a lot's type, cutting date, cutting number, bale size and weight, color, odor, RFV and other characteristics. Some listings contain digital images of

the forage.

Four people work with the Forage Testing Program. Kimberly Field and Bryn Fallis work the lab in Frankfort, Jim Wade covers the mid-western area, and Gary Green covers the far western part of the state. The Frankfort lab and Gary Green take appointments for the Forage Testing Van.

The Forage Testing Van is outfitted and used for educational purposes. There are certain criteria for running the van: four separate 20-amp outlets designated for the hay van, an accessible location, and an alternate location for inclement weather. The "Van" can be booked for hay contests, association meetings, and county fairs.

KDA works closely with Dr. Garry Lacefield, Extension Forage Specialist; Dr. Ray Smith, Extension Forage Specialist; and Tom Keene, Hay Specialist with the University of Kentucky. There is a great forage Web site sponsored by UK that contains forage information, publications and links; the Web site is [www.uky.edu/Ag/Forages](http://www.uky.edu/Ag/Forages).

For more information on KDA's Forage Testing Program, call the toll-free Hay Hotline, 1-800-248-4628, or contact Kimberly Field by e-mail at [kimberly.field@ky.gov](mailto:kimberly.field@ky.gov).

## Kentucky Department of Agriculture



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